

VZCZCXRO5872  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHCV #1089/01 1561406  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 051406Z JUN 07  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8910  
INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001089

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ TO DECREE CUBAN-STYLE NATIONAL POLICE LAW

REF: A. 05 CARACAS 03521  
[1](#)B. CARACAS 01055

CARACAS 00001089 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON FOR 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: President Chavez announced May 22 that he would soon decree a National Police Law that, among other things, would call for a new community police force. The announcement comes just as the National Assembly was finishing work on a final draft of the law, and further highlights the legislature's increasing irrelevance. Post's review of the draft bill sent to Chavez indicates the Venezuelan president will name the Director General of the national force, who will be responsible for investigating crimes, as well as "watching, controlling, and protecting" demonstrations. Crime continues to be a growing voter concern, and even official estimates suggest the murder rate may have tripled since Chavez came to power in 1998. However, the law appears mainly aimed at increasing Chavez' control of the police and ability to squash dissent, and is unlikely to significantly reduce crime. End Summary.

-----  
Chavez Takes Over National Police Law  
-----

[1](#)2. (C) President Chavez announced that he would soon issue the National Police Law as a presidential decree law during the May 22 inauguration of the board of directors for newly nationalized telephone service Cantv. The law passed the first of two required readings in the legislature in July 2004, but has since languished in the National Assembly's Interior Policy Committee. Chavez' announcement came just as the committee was finishing up the final version of the National Police Law. NA President Cilia Flores said she was not notified of the president's decision before his speech, although like a good Bolivarian she quickly added that she supported the decision and that the most important thing was that the law passed soon. Committee member Calixto Ortega's assistant told us May 25 that the unfinished bill had been forwarded to the President.

-----  
What to Possibly Expect  
-----

[1](#)3. (C) While it is unclear how much of the NA's work will be reflected in Chavez' decree law, Post's review of the draft law sent to Chavez indicates that for now only the political police (DISIP), the federal scientific, penal, and criminal

investigative police (CICPC), the transit police, and select members of the Caracas Metropolitan police--which will be disbanded--would form the national force. (Note: According to a former police chief, incorporating the CICPC requires a constitutional change.) It will be subject to a "democratically elected citizen oversight committee." Contrary to initial reports, it does not appear that state and municipal constabularies will be eliminated nor will their responsibilities be reduced. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Popular Power for Interior and Justice (MPPIJ) will oversee these forces and can "intervene" at its discretion.

¶4. (C) Ortega told PolCouns and Poloff May 15 that the bill would likely be a transitional law that would seek to consolidate and standardize norms for Venezuela's 118 state and municipal police forces, which up to this point have been regulated by different standards. Ortega said the bill would also seek to professionalize the forces by attempting to root out corruption and nepotism, establishing a training program, and increasing salaries and benefits for the country's roughly 100,000 police officers. Post notes that the bill does allow the MPPIJ to design and implement norms and training programs for all police forces, but Chavez will name the Director General of the national police force, potentially undermining the ministry's control. The national force's duties will include investigating crimes, "watching, controlling, and protecting" demonstrations, assisting in migration matters, traffic control, and protecting dignitaries, including accredited diplomats if requested. The MPPIJ will have the authority to request military assistance with police functions when it deems necessary as well.

-----  
Potential Cuban Element?  
-----

CARACAS 00001089 002.2 OF 002

¶5. (C) In addition to creating a national police force, Chavez said the law will also mandate community councils (consejos comunales) to create community police forces that will work with and be trained by the new national constabulary. According to Chavez, the government will provide radios, uniforms, and "equipment" for these community police. Chavez said the law would be based on the Cuban police model because he claimed that in Cuba it was "extremely rare to hear of street crime or murder." (Comment: While Chavez' did not make specific mention of them, we believe he is referring to the Cuban Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), which serves as the regime's eyes and ears.)

¶6. (C) Chavez also appears to be trying to use the security issue to set the stage for greater acceptance of his socialist agenda. During his announcement, Chavez framed the issue of crime as a symptom of Venezuelan society's deteriorating values system, implicitly contrasting Venezuela's capitalistic nature with the socialist one of Cuba, which he claimed "had another form of life that is not consumer-driven, or based on ambition for material wealth," which he said "drives many people to criminality." In underscoring this point Chavez also could not resist taking a swipe at the United States, saying that criminals there use "rifles and automatic weapons and walk around gunning down people even in high schools."

-----  
Comment  
-----

¶7. (C) Crime has been the top concern for most Venezuelans over the past several years, but has yet to become a significant political liability for Chavez. According to Ministry of Health and Social Development statistics, the

projected murder rate for 2005 was 20,000 homicides, which if accurate, would mean the murder rate has tripled since Chavez came to power (Ref A). Neither the NA's nor the president's plans are likely to significantly stem crime. The president's proposal, if it includes a community council-run police component, may worsen the problem by putting more guns on the streets. Given Chavez' forceful reaction to the recent pro-RCTV closures (Ref B), the law's concentration of police power in his hands and the potential creation of a Cuban-style "big brother" element does not bode well for future protests against unpopular BRV decisions.

BROWNFIELD